



OUTSIDE

Activating Strategies to Fight Hikikomori Condition

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MODULE 1

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PODERÍO

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MODULE 1: TRAINER AWARENESS PROGRAMME

Beyond the Screen: Identifying Screen Addiction

1. Introduction

Addiction, especially to screens, is a pressing concern in the context of hikikomori. Individuals experiencing hikikomori often retreat into virtual worlds and become excessively reliant on screens for social interaction and entertainment. This addiction can deepen their isolation and exacerbate their withdrawal from real-life activities and social connections. Understanding the underlying mechanisms of addiction is crucial for educators and trainers to support individuals affected by the hikikomori phenomenon effectively.

The syndrome is characterised by seclusion, loneliness, and addiction to digital media, which have become its distinguishing features. Addiction to video games, already recognised in the ICD-11, involves compulsive behaviours where individuals can spend days in front of screens, neglecting basic needs such as eating or sleeping. This addiction stems from the activation of brain circuits associated with drug consumption, which any device with internet access, online games, and social media can trigger. Young people and adults who start early with these devices may experience difficulties in psychomotor development and attention, as well as develop other addictions.

Other mental health conditions like substance abuse, social isolation, autism, ADHD, depression, and anxiety frequently accompany video game addiction. In Europe, the internet addiction rate is around 4%, with some individuals spending long hours in front of screens, showing marked disinterest in other activities.

The term "Hikikomori," implying voluntary isolation, causes individuals to retreat into a virtual world created within the walls of their room, altering their sleep patterns and exhibiting aggressive or obsessive behaviours that, in some cases, may lead to suicide.



2. Background, types and prevalence among Hikikomori individuals

In 1995, Griffiths introduced the term Internet addiction disorder. The following year (1996), Dr. Kimberly S. Young, an accredited psychologist with international recognition in the field of Internet addiction, presented a case of a woman with no prior psychiatric history who was labelled as an "Internet addict." This case served as a starting point, and, unsurprisingly, more studies emerged shortly afterwards (Kaunt, et al., 1998). This research gained significant attention, as it suggested that the internet diminishes social engagement, and well-being, and contributes to depression.

According to authors such as Drs. Gregory L. Jantz and David Greenfield, screen addiction is a form of behavioural addiction that is typified by an obsessive and excessive use of digital screens that negatively impacts social, mental, and physical well-being and interferes with daily functioning. It shares characteristics with other addictive disorders, such as substance abuse and gambling addiction, such as cravings, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and a loss of control over usage

Since they primarily rely on digital devices for entertainment and interaction, people who experience Hikikomori are especially susceptible to screen addiction. The relationship between screen addiction and hikikomori is complex and multifaceted. While they are distinct conditions, they have significant overlaps and interconnections.

Addiction to games, social media, the internet, and screens in general are just a few of the ways this addiction can show up. As observed, screen addiction encompasses a range of behaviours marked by an inability to control screen usage, preoccupation with digital devices, and withdrawal symptoms when unable to access screens

Dr. Kimberly S. Young classified the various types of internet addiction as outlined below:

- 1. Gaming addiction:** This involves an excessive compulsion to play online games, where individuals have difficulty controlling their use of online gaming platforms.



2. **Net compulsions:** engaging in online interactive activities, including gambling, trading stocks, auctions, and online shopping. Excessive time spent in such activities may lead to overspending, ruining one's financial stability, and causing problems at work.
3. **Cybersex addiction:** is characterised by excessive consumption of online pornography content, adult chatrooms, and webcam services, which can harm personal life, relationships, and emotional well-being.
4. **Cyber-relationship addiction:** turning to chat rooms or social networking sites to create relationships online. Cyber relationship addicts are obsessed with finding relationships on online platforms. As a result, addicted individuals may lose touch with the real world, leading to the destruction of offline personal relationships.
5. **Compulsive information seeking:** the uncontrollable urge to search for data on the Internet. This reflects an excessive compulsion to gather information online to the point of developing serious anxiety problems.

Another type is **social media addiction**, which has emerged in the last few years and encompasses platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat, among others. These platforms can be highly addictive, providing users with a false sense of social engagement, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The prevalence of screen addiction among individuals experiencing Hikikomori is significant, given their tendency to retreat into virtual worlds as a coping mechanism for social difficulties and emotional distress. The immersive nature of digital environments provides an escape from the challenges of the real world, making screens a comforting refuge for those struggling with the phenomenon.

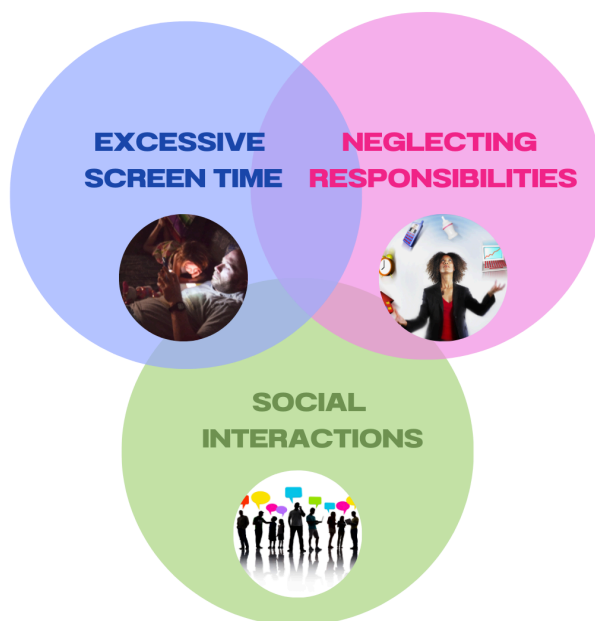
The study by Tateno et al. (2019) examined the relationship between Internet and smartphone addiction and the Hikikomori trait in young Japanese adults. They found that social isolation and social media use are closely linked among Hikikomori individuals who spend most of their day online. While some men prefer online gaming with virtual friends, maintaining anonymity, women tend to use their smartphones to stay connected to social media, though they may



feel overwhelmed by the volume of messages. Both genders show an aversion to face-to-face interactions, fearing errors and humiliation, which can lead to the rejection of social events. Additionally, young people may experience deeper trauma from negative real-life events compared to online situations.

3. Early signs, symptoms and effects

Identifying the early signs of screen addiction is crucial for early intervention and support for Hikikomori cases. Individuals experiencing screen addiction often exhibit various behavioural and psychological patterns that can serve as indicators of problematic screen usage. Understanding these signs can help educators, trainers, and professionals recognise when someone may be struggling with screen addiction and provide appropriate assistance.



At the Madrid Institute of Psychology, it has been observed that when someone starts to develop such an addiction, they may not be aware of it or may choose not to acknowledge it.

Some behaviours that may serve as warning signs and should be avoided once recognised include:

Source: Own elaboration

- Feeling the need to be constantly connected to these technologies;
- Decreased or interference in the ability to concentrate;
- Becoming nervous when unable to access them;
- Isolating oneself due to their use;
- Reducing sleep hours due to their use;
- Giving up certain activities to prioritise their use.



Therefore, excessive use of screens, neglecting responsibilities, and isolating oneself from social activities are key signs of screen dependency. This involves dedicating too much time to digital screens, ignoring personal, academic, or work responsibilities, and opting for online interactions instead of face-to-face conversations.

People struggling with screen addiction frequently exhibit compulsive behaviours towards their screen usage. This may manifest in incessantly checking their devices, feeling restless or anxious when separated from screens, and experiencing a compulsive need to engage with digital content.

When attempts are made to limit their screen time, these individuals may react with irritability, frustration, or even anger. They might resist efforts to reduce their screen usage and react defensively or hostilely when confronted about their habits.

Furthermore, it may result in the disregard for fundamental self-care practices like good sleep and personal hygiene. This could involve forgoing activities like showering, brushing teeth, or changing clothes regularly, disrupting sleep patterns or quality, and potentially causing insomnia or disturbed sleep.

Regarding psychological and social effects, it can exacerbate feelings of **anxiety and depression**. The detrimental effects of their excessive screen usage often cause those who suffer from screen addiction to feel more stressed, anxious, and depressed. Additionally, prioritising screen-based activities over in-person interactions can result in **social isolation and loneliness**, further perpetuating the cycle of addiction. This isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness and alienation, compounding the challenges individuals face.

Moreover, it can strain relationships with family members and friends, as individuals may struggle to engage with others on a meaningful level. This difficulty in communication can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and a breakdown in interpersonal relationships.





4. Understanding underlying factors

Screen addiction is impacted by several social, cultural, psychological, and technological factors. By examining these underlying influences, educators, trainers, and professionals can better understand the root causes of screen addiction among hikikomori and tailor interventions accordingly.

In today's society, there is often immense social pressure to achieve success and meet social standards of achievement marginalised pressure is a psychological and social phenomenon in which individuals change their behaviour, attitudes, and even opinions to please others and avoid being rejected or marginalised. In itself, social pressure is neither good nor bad, but it can be how negative behaviours are fostered and spread in society, especially among adolescents, and it continues to be present throughout our lives, conditioning actions and ideas in one way or another.

Social pressure is negative when its influence leads to harmful behaviours for the individual. Among these behaviours, we would find those that harm their health, jeopardise their work and academic performance, or lead them into conflict with their family, such as drug use, criminal activities, self-harm, risky behaviours, or isolation. This pressure can manifest in various ways, and as a result, individuals may turn to screens as a means of escaping or distracting themselves from the stress and expectations placed upon them.

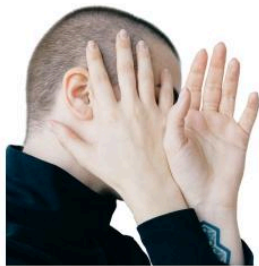
There is not a single explanation for technology addiction; it's influenced by a blend of factors:



Neuro-Anatomical insights: Studies reveal that individuals addicted to the internet exhibit brain alterations akin to those with substance dependencies or compulsive gambling habits. Notably, changes in the pre-frontal area, associated with attention and prioritisation, lead addicts to prioritise internet use over basic needs like eating or sleeping.



Biological influences: Research suggests that people with an addiction have imbalances in neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, crucial for brain communication. Lower levels of these chemicals may drive individuals towards substance use, as certain drugs elevate dopamine and serotonin levels.



Personal characteristics: Those with shyness or social difficulties face a higher risk of technology addiction. The anonymity of online interactions provides an appealing alternative to face-to-face communication for such individuals.

Internet-related factors: The internet's immediate and unpredictable rewards contribute to addiction vulnerability. Platforms like Facebook offer a constant stream of potentially positive, albeit unpredictable, information with each login, fostering a desire to return for more.



Internet addiction tends to disproportionately affect certain demographics and individuals with specific characteristics:

- Males
- Adolescents
- Individuals who struggle with social interaction and experience anxiety or fear.
- Depression
- Individuals with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are at a higher risk of developing Internet addiction.
- Smoking
- Drug addiction problems are also more susceptible to this condition.



These risk factors underscore the intricate interplay between psychological, social, and behavioural factors in the development of Internet addiction for Hikikomori individuals.

Screen addiction can serve as a maladaptive coping mechanism for dealing with stress, anxiety, trauma, or other emotional difficulties. Hikikomori individuals may turn to screens as a form of escapism, seeking temporary relief from negative emotions or challenging life circumstances.

Screens have become a ubiquitous presence in our daily environment. From smartphones and tablets to computers and televisions, they have become an integral part of our lives. However, their seamless integration has made it difficult for individuals to set boundaries and regulate their screen usage effectively.

Advancements in technology, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and immersive gaming experiences, are becoming more immersive and engaging. While these advancements have the potential for positive applications, they also bring new challenges in managing screen addiction and their impact on the hikikomori phenomenon.

5. Practical strategies for intervention and support

As a trainer, it is essential to be aware of the signs of screen addiction in the environment. As noted previously, screen addiction, or internet addiction, can manifest in Hikikomoris cases through a range of signs and symptoms, including mood changes, social isolation, and academic or occupational issues. Below are a series of tests,, therapies, strategies, and recommendations to incorporate into your practice:

Internet addiction test

The Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire (IADQ), created by Dr. Kimberly Young and named “The Internet Addiction Test.” contains a 20-item questionnaire that a proctor provides to the client.



It is a tool for diagnosing problematic internet use. Originally crafted as a research and diagnostic instrument, it aligns with the DSM-IV criteria for diagnosing pathological gambling. The IAT serves as a symptom assessment tool for internet addiction. It includes eight criteria for addiction:

1. the person is preoccupied with the Internet,
2. there is a need to spend more and more time on the Internet to achieve satisfaction;
3. unsuccessfully attempts to control, reduce, or interrupt the use of the Internet;
4. feels anxiety and depression in reducing or stopping the use of the internet;
5. remains on the internet much longer than it is intended;
6. endangers personal contacts, jobs, study, career;
7. conceals the truth about addiction from family members and helping professionals;
8. uses the internet to escape the problem.

For further information, the following article provides the questionnaire details:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/internet-addiction>

The psychometric qualities of internet addiction scales have been the subject of multiple critical reviews. Dr. Young's Internet Addiction Test, which has been translated into numerous languages worldwide and validated by retest reliability, consistency, and validity measures, is the most widely used tool for assessing problematic internet use.

Mindfulness-Based Therapy

This therapy method involves employing mindfulness techniques aimed at assisting individuals in coping with stress and anxiety, which frequently serve as common triggers for excessive screen usage. Through mindfulness practice, individuals can cultivate a greater sense of presence and awareness regarding their thoughts and emotions. This heightened awareness enables them to better regulate their screen time impulses.



There are various mindfulness strategies designed to help individuals avoid social isolation and screen addiction. Some of these strategies include:

1. Mindfulness practice: This can help reduce screen dependency by fostering greater awareness of activities and social relationships outside the digital world.
2. Setting time limits: By applying mindfulness principles, individuals can consciously set time limits for electronic device usage.
3. Connecting with nature: Spending time outdoors and connecting with nature is an effective way to practice mindfulness and reduce screen dependency.
4. Engaging in social activities: Encouraging meaningful social relationships and participating in social activities outside the digital environment is crucial for combating social isolation and screen addiction.

The Positive Psychology webpage includes a variety of mindfulness exercises and activities specifically designed for adults, along with a downloadable PDF. The article provides a roadmap for those looking to incorporate mindfulness into their daily lives, therapy sessions, or coaching sessions.

These scientifically-backed exercises aim to cultivate inner peace and equip readers with tools to enhance mindfulness in their clients, students, or employees. Link:

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>

Tips for trainers

Strategy	Description
Build trusting relationships	Prioritise building relationships based on trust to foster open communication and mutual support with them.
Encourage support groups	Encourage seeking support groups



	<p>specialising in hikikomori or screen addiction.</p>
Set realistic goals	<p>Help set achievable goals for reducing screen time and gradually reintegrating into social activities. Start with small, achievable goals, like reducing screen time by 15 minutes per day.</p> <p>-Website: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm</p>
Promote healthy habits through	<p>Encourage engaging in healthy activities such as exercise, outdoor activities, hobbies, and personal interests.</p> <p>-Website: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults-aged-19-to-64/</p>
Limit screen time	<p>Collaborate on creating schedules with designated screen-free periods and establishing clear usage boundaries.</p> <p>-Website: https://www.forestapp.cc/</p>
Encourage them to explore new activities or hobbies	<p>Introduce alternative forms of entertainment and personal growth activities, such as local community groups or clubs based on shared interests.</p> <p>- Website: Meetup.com</p>
Provide emotional support	<p>Offer a safe space to express emotions and provide emotional support throughout their recovery</p>



	process.
Monitor progress	Regularly track individual progress, celebrate their achievements, and adjust strategies as needed.
Involve family and friends	Involve family and friends to create a robust support network and foster collaboration in the recovery journey. For instance, plan family outings or gatherings to enhance connections.

6. Conclusion

As stated above, a new psychological and social structure is emerging, one that does not develop in the real world but rather begins to occupy a virtual space. Some individuals need not feel completely abandoned, suggesting that the Internet has provided a new "social" tool for those lacking interpersonal skills or mental health issues. This new space demonstrates that one can be entirely accompanied yet simultaneously alone in a room where the need to remain connected is essential to avoid feeling deprived.

It is important to recognise the potential risks of Internet addiction and address them appropriately. Studies indicate that individuals with Internet addiction are more likely to develop addictions to alcohol and other drugs. Furthermore, it can disrupt healthy lifestyle habits, leading to difficulties in maintaining regular sleep patterns, increased sedentary behaviour, and obesity.

Access to information on the Internet regarding self-injury methods can also worsen self-injurious behaviours and suicidal tendencies among affected individuals. In addition, Internet addiction is linked to an increased risk of psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), with research suggesting that up to one in four individuals with Internet addiction also have some form of psychiatric disorder.



Countries such as Japan, China, the United States, Italy, Turkey, and Spain, among others, are witnessing the emergence of cases experiencing the initial wave of technological isolation, known as "screenagers" or Hikikomori. The fulfilment of progressively demanding expectations from their families, jobs, and society is being neglected or put off, with all the ramifications this has on several levels.

It is imperative to emphasise the importance of early intervention when addressing screen addiction within the context of hikikomori. By recognising early signs and symptoms, trainers can play a vital role in offering support and guidance to individuals affected by this phenomenon.

Furthermore, taking a holistic approach that considers the multifaceted nature of screen addiction, including its psychological, social, and environmental factors, is essential for effective intervention. Finally, fostering empathy and understanding towards individuals struggling with screen addiction is crucial for building trust and rapport, which are fundamental for successful intervention and support.

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